

GULF OF MEXICO ALLIANCE RESILIENCE WORKING GROUP

Coordinate and enhance efforts of local, state, federal, business and non-profit partners to assist coastal communities and ecosystems in the Gulf of Mexico region in becoming more resilient in structure and function. (Working Mission of the Resilience Working Group, September 21, 2007)

The Gulf of Mexico Alliance

The Gulf of Mexico Alliance is a partnership of the states of Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas, with the goal of significantly increasing regional collaboration to enhance the environmental and economic health of the Gulf of Mexico. In March of 2006, the Alliance released the Governor's Action Plan, identifying six priority issues: (1) water quality for healthy beaches and shellfish beds; (2) wetland and coastal conservation and restoration; (3) coastal community resilience and hazard mitigation; (4) environmental education; (5) identification and characterization of Gulf habitats; and (6) reducing nutrient inputs to coastal ecosystems. Priority Issue Teams (PITs) are working to implement the action steps in the Governor's Action Plan. With the recent addition of the Community Resilience Working Group there are now six teams, each including members from all five Gulf states:

- Habitat Identification
- Water Quality
- Nutrient Reduction
- Regional Restoration and Conservation Team (RRCT)
- Environmental Education
- Community Resilience

The Resilience Working Group

The Regional Restoration and Conservation Team initiated the call for the new resilience group because they recognized the need for additional expertise to address the resilience-related action steps in the Governor's Action Plan. The newly formed group consists of approximately 40 individuals from a variety of disciplines representing all five states as well as a number of federal agencies. The group convened for the first time in July during the Alliance Implementation Conference. On behalf of the Alliance Management Team (AMT), Dr. Bill Walker, Director of the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources, delivered the new group's charge. Dr. Walker identified two main purposes or goals for the group: 1) To share and collaborate on lessons and experiences, and 2) To begin the cross-state dialog about how to move from response to resilience. Tina Shumate of the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources and Dr. Rod Emmer of Louisiana Sea Grant graciously volunteered to co-chair the new group.

The Gulf of Mexico Alliance Resilience Working Group held its second meeting September 17-19 in Biloxi, Mississippi. Hosted by members from Mississippi and Alabama, and held at the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources, this second meeting focused on sharing information about existing resilience activities, defining the group's mission, and beginning to identify activities the group might pursue.

At the Biloxi meeting, Dr. Walker shared the outcomes of an August meeting of the Gulf Governors, Congressional members and staff, and federal agency representatives to discuss the successes of the Alliance to date and next steps. Attending Governors expressed strong support for the Alliance, and resilience had been an explicit topic of discussion in the meeting. Dr. Walker said the AMT will be developing a new action plan outlining future goals and action items for the Alliance in the coming months, and urged the Working Group to think about items they would like to see included in this new plan.

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Initial Ideas about Products and Activities

The Working Group has just begun to identify activities and products members would like to pursue, including items for the next action plan. Initial suggestions include the following:

- Inventory existing information and tools, including policies, models, and educational efforts,
- Conduct outreach and education, joining/supporting existing efforts such as the Coastal Storms Program where possible,
- Ensure that tools are useful for and available to decision-makers at the local government level,
- Ensure that necessary data (e.g. topography and bathymetry) are collected,
- Support local resilience pilots, and produce case studies to share lessons,
- Work with private sector interests as well as public sector decision-makers,
- Test out the Resiliency Index
- Bring together individuals from different disciplines involved in resilience such as planners, emergency managers, resource managers, and floodplain managers.

Resiliency Index Project

An initial action of the Alliance (Governors' Action Plan For Healthy and Resilient Coasts, 2006) is "to determine how to enhance coastal communities' resilience to disaster and begin to identify a methodology for the development of a resiliency index." During the Working Group's second meeting, Rod Emmer of Louisiana Sea Grant and LaDon Swann of Mississippi/Alabama Sea Grant presented a draft Resiliency Index for local communities. The Louisiana and Mississippi/Alabama team drafted a methodology based on data and personnel readily available to communities. This Resiliency Index gives communities a quick self-assessment of their current resiliency and identifies selected potential vulnerabilities. The Index will be field tested in Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana communities in the coming months with a final version expected in 2008.

Next Meeting

Participation in the Resilience Working Group is open and encouraged. The next Working Group meeting will be hosted by Texas Sea Grant and the Gulf of Mexico Foundation in Corpus Christi in December 11-13. Please contact Heidi Recksiek (information below) for details if you are interested in attending.

For More Information

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